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ABSTRACT

The kind of life led by retired faculty and the benefits of belonging to an Emeritus College are discussed. It is suggested that most retired faculty continue to reside in the communities where they spent many years working. They may use the college library and attend functions at the college. They are candidates for the unique organization that may be called an Emeritus College, or center or club, one of which has been formed at Southern Illinois University. The Emeritus College provides the opportunity to maintain associations, do creative writing, give occasional lectures, and socialize with old colleagues. Such an organization must assure administrators and younger faculty that retirees will not interfere, duplicate, or substitute for any teacher, researcher, graduate assistant, or any salaried employed of the university. There should be a clear understanding that retired faculty can serve only in a complementary capacity to enrich the service of the university. It is concluded that some form of official organization of retired faculty fits in with the trend of the times: to provide creative opportunities for educated retirees to help maintain their health, stability, and morale; to involve their expertise and maturity for the benefit of the college; and to encourage interest in the older years. (SW)

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# THE EMERITUS COLLEGE: BOON OR BOONDOGGLE?

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Retired professors don't fall easily into the stereotype of elderly persons as poor, frail or ill, needy or lonely. They are as a whole, healthy, affluent, vigorous, and active. They rarely frequent the local senior citizen center, except, perhaps on occasion to give a lecture or lead a discussion. Most are happy in their retirement and some claim to be more busy than when they were working full time. Yet an examination of what keeps them so busy points to doing chores around the house, hobbies or reading they never got around to before. Many look for part time jobs--but jobs that are devoid of the bureaucratic pressures and shenanigans of campus life. A good number of emeriti do go off for full or part time appointments at other universities. Those, we don't label as "retirees."

Most retired faculty continue to reside in the communties where they spent a major section of their working life, making use of their golden parking sticker for attendance at football games, library, concerts or occasional lunches with their old cronies or new friends.

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

These are the candidates for the unique organization that may be called an Emeritus College, or center or club that we at SIU have formed which seems to have generated some interest around the country.

The Emeritus College, representing as it does a collection of individuals who are educated, comparatively healthy, well-off financially, reasonably knowledgable and dedicated to social betterment is a unique organization.

It lays no claim to academic tradition. It has no turf to hold and nurture in the university. Its members hold no tenure, get no salary, have no authority. In the general social milieu retirees are seen as being outside the racetrack, feeding contentedly on pension pastures, quietly awaiting the cue to exit peacefully after a lifetime of toil and service.

Organizations of retirees are a relatively new phenomena in our society. Their purpose is mainly political, to protect their pensions; social, to provide opportunities for leisure activities; organizational, to compensate for the loss of status and recognition associated with work, rank and clout.

In academia an Emeritus College that is recognized as an official entity on the campus, with office, budget, and fiscal authority, is apt to raise eyebrows, to say the least. To some faculty and administrators: "What do these people want? Haven't they had enough? Are they trying to hold on? Why don't they make way for the younger generation?"

Strangely enough, these questions were also asked by emeriti themselves in the first year of organization. And some retired faculty are still asking them.

At best, there are mixed feelings on the part of working faculty, administrators and retirees. Emeriti are seen as "elder statesmen" and so have the prestige of their rank, publications, and experience. The fact that they have no turf to protect, no tenure (the "iron rice bowl" the Chinese call it), and no career to embellish can be reassuring to nervous and ambitious academics. Emeriti are "has beens". They are no threat to anyone. That can be an advantage in today's political atmosphere that pervades our academic bureaucracy.

Whether or not an Emeritus College is successful depends on a number of factors: the numbers of retired faculty living in the vicinity of the campus, the support of the administration, the cooperation of the faculty, the leadership and understanding of the emeriti themselves.

What is also required is a clearer understanding of the stage in life known as retirement, especially as this relates to professionals, intellectuals and career strivers, such as university faculty. In our society structured employment is the glue that fosters associations and holds them together. Without work, retirement can be a lonely state. As gerontologists we know that surrogate vehicles are sometimes poor substitutes for the loneliness and anomie that ensues from idleness. Most academic retirees say they are "happy" in their retirement.

"Happy" doesn't mean there are no periods of unhappiness, frustration, or even spells of depression. Retirement is the last stage of life and knowing that there will be no "second chances" in careers, accomplishments, love, achievements, does not promote a happy state. There are few retirees who do not look back from time to time and sigh: "I could have done that" or "if only I had...."

Involvement, participation, and creative activity removes retirees from the depressing temptations to dwell on "what-might-have-beens."

As far as the Emeritus College is concerned that, for the academic retiree, is it's greatest potential and hope. There is the opportunity to maintain associations, do creative writing, give occasional lectures, socialize with old colleagues--all these are ingredients that counter-balance the tendencies to mope, idle, or experience that "esprit d'escalier" of what might-have-been. Even travel to foreign lands, or visits to children and their families is enhanced when one returns and shares these experiences with friends.

For the administration, however, an Emeritus College is seen from a different perspective. The university as a bureaucracy is only minimally interested in the personal welfare of the individual, especially one that has been retired. In our institution a certificate of appreciation, a parking sticker, a library card, and usually a shared office in the old department accompanies a handshake and a pat on the back at the exit door. Then it's "Nice to have had you around. Don't hang around too long." The status of a retiree is that of a minority in that there is concern that the retiree may hold on too long, interfere with the job or make life more difficult for the working faculty. In our youth-oriented society there is a recurring fear that older persons who hold on to their careers are taking jobs away from younger persons. As we know, that's the contradiction we face in helping older individuals work longer while trying to increase opportunities for employment and careers for a younger generation. One dean actually expressed his opposition with the remark: "I don't want to see a lot of gray heads running all over this campus." The fact that the working faculty members can look at them and even hope that one day they will be able to join their ranks doesn't mitigate their concern about interfering with their authority or retarding their career advancement or salary increment.

The academic bureaucracy itself is a unique creature. In an almost pure sense academicians are independent entrepreneurs. They resent any interference with their teaching or research. Academic freedom cuts both ways: it lends support to creative, innovative, and progressive ideas; but it also discourages accountability and group responsibility and discipline. This aura of individual "excellence" doesn't promote the collegeality with retirees or, in fact, often with fellow professors.

Thus the principles set down by the emeritus college must strongly eschew any suspicions that any of the retirees will interfere with, duplicate, or substitute for any teacher, researcher, or even graduate assistant or any salaried employee of the university. The clear understanding is that retired faculty can serve only in a complementary capacity, to enrich, enhance the service of the university as an auxiliary not a primary force.

One thing that may help to convince the administration of the benefits of keeping retirees close to the institution, and it must be subtly presented, is the fact that they are financially well-off (better than most alumni), advanced in age. Many have grown children or heirs that are quite well of and don't have great need of their inheritance. Treat them right and the university foundation has a good chance of eventually benefitting. That argument makes an impression.

As far as the community is concerned an Emeritus College is a vague and mysterious entity. Most persons not related to the university don't even know that the word means. Attitudes toward a college in a small town are mixed, from very positive, to suspicious, to downright hostile. And that despite the obvious economic and cultural benefits that such an institution brings to a community. Any university president can tell you that public relations is a full time job, and our president, for example, in speaking to the Chamber of Commerce or groups of

businessmen in the area never fails to mention the Emeritus College and the willingness of retired faculty to volunteer to help in the community.

Our experience with the Emeritus College at SIU had made us aware that there is much we need to know about retirement and academic emeriti. What are the policies and practices in universities? What do retired professors do after they retire? How many continue in their home university on a part time basis? How many get other part time or full time jobs in other universities? As consultants? In private industry? Or in business for themselves? How many higher institutions have organized groups of retired faculty and what do they do? What do administrators, faculty, students think about the presence of retired professors on the campus? Can gerontology centers that exist on most campuses find that an emeritus organization is a suitable vehicle for study, internship, consultation, service? To answer some of these questions, the Academy of Independent Scholars, a prestigeous organization made largely of retired academics, has been considering undertaking a project to find the answers.

Based on inquiries we at SIU have received, and the concerns of many individuals in higher institutions here and in Europe, it appears that some form of official organization of retired faculty has become a timely item on the gerontology agenda. It fits in with the trend of the times: to provide creative opportunities for educated retirees to help maintain their health, stability, and morale; to involve their experience, maturity, and expertise for the benefit of the university and community; and to encourage interest and understanding of that state in life known as "aging" and so inspire in all our citizens the confidence and security of carrying on a productive and happier life to the end.